

THE PARADISE WHYDAH AND THE BROAD-TAILED PARADISE WHYDAH

By

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With regard to the separation of the Paradise Whydah, Steganura paradisaea (Linnaeus) and the Broad-tailed Paradise Whydah, Steganura orientalis (Heuglin) as distinct species, it may be of interest to note an occurrence of both species in the same locality.

In May, June and July 1964 I could be almost certain of seeing S. orientalis on or near a small open 'shamba' at Msati, near Chidya, in the Masasi district of southern Tanzania. But on June 28th, near this same 'shamba' and immediately after my observing S. orientalis, a single adult male S. paradisaea appeared, and perched openly at about 20 ft. up. The two central tail-feathers of S. orientalis were seen as usual to be broad to their tips, but those of S. paradisaea were seen as two broad and short with bare shafts when blown or held apart coming thinly into one when joined. Distinction when feathers are seen separately is absolutely unmistakable.

I had not previously seen S. paradisaea nearer than the Chiungutwa area on the Masasi-Newala road; S. orientalis I never saw anywhere outside a radius of less than two miles round Chidya.

Call

I never heard the call of S. paradisaea; but I made four written records to the call of S. orientalis, which is described by Mackworth-Praed and Grant (1960, Vol. II p. 1051) as "Unrecorded". These notes (for May 17th, May 20th, June 2nd and July 11th) all record the call as a rattle or chatter, reminding me of the Mistle-Thrush, Turdus viscivorus, but rather quieter and smoother in sound; or of the chatter of the Grey-headed Sparrow, Passer griseus Vieillot, though again less harsh than this. The rattle was sometimes prolonged for two or three seconds; and I once heard it in a whisper - a kind of rattling twitter, given on rising from the ground. During the display recorded below, the usual rattle was heard, followed by 'chuck, chuck, chuck,' in the same timbre.

Display

On July 11th, I witnessed an interesting display by an adult male S. orientalis, in an open tree at 15 - 20 ft. up. At first it made very brief flights - little more than extended hops - usually approaching a small bird not certainly identified as the female, and giving the special call as above.

When stationary, the bird on one occasion for some time held its tail in a remarkable position, as if on three different levels. The short tail-feathers were held with their barbs vertical as usual; but one of the two elongated tail-feathers was also held, at a slightly lower level, with the barbs vertical; and the other elongated tail-feather was held lower still, 'very thin with a blob at the tip'. (I understand that the very unusual appearance of the lowest feather was caused by extreme wear in a feather which had for some reason not been moulted.) At the same time the head was held forward and nodded fairly vigorously again and again.

The Paradise Whydahs

Another display of the bird on the same occasion, was when it sat perched normally, with the tail hanging as usual, and turned its head steadily from side to side.

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